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PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL MONUMENTS,

PUNJAB.

MEMORANDUM ON ANCIENT MONUMENTS

IN THE

PESHAWAR DISTRICT.

BY

CAPTAIN H. H. COLE, R.E.,

CURATOR OF ANCIENT MONUMENTS IN INDIA.

(Illustrated by a rough sketch.)

SIMLA:

GOVERNMENT CENTRAL BRANCH PRESS,

1882.

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72

Memorandum on ancient monuments in the Peshawar District.

DURING my visit to Peshawar and the Eusofzai district in February last, I had an opportunity of inspecting the very interesting ruins which General Cunningham had selected for exploration.

2. Reaching Peshawar on the 6th February I had the advantage of conferring with Mr. Cordery, the Commissioner, and learnt from him that Lieutenant Martin, R.E., had just left for Charsuddah with a company of sappers.

3. On the 9th February I accompanied Mr. Beckett, the Deputy Commissioner (who is intimately acquainted with the Eusofzai district), to Hoti Mardan, and meeting Mr. Robinson, the Assistant Commissioner, received the greatest assistance during my stay in Eusofzai. On the 11th February Mr. Robinson and I rode out through Shahbazgarhi to Shewa, the following day visiting Ranigat and riding round the north side of the Karamar hill to Bakshali. At Shewa we were hospitably entertained by Muhammed Umr Khan, and occupied the principal room in his house, one end being slightly raised and railed off with a quaint wooden railing of geometric tracery. At Bakshali we put up in the village guest house, a shed of mud and thatch, but preferable to tents in the keen climate which prevails at the time of year.

On the 14th February I visited the Takht-i-Bahi, and on the 15th rode to Lieutenant Martin's camp at Charsuddah, where I stayed a night.

4. The following are the points which occurred to me at the various places, and which I commend to the notice of the Punjab Government :—

Inscription at Shahbazgarhi.

This inscription has been fully described by Major-General Cunningham in Volume V, page 19, Archæological Survey of India. He thus mentions it :—

"The great inscription of Asoka is engraved on a large shapeless mass of trap rock lying about 80 feet up the slope of the hill, with its western face looking downwards towards the village of Shahbazgarhi. The greater portion of the inscription is on the eastern face of the rock looking up the hill, but all the latter part which contains the names of the Greek kings is on the western face. The mass of rock is 24 feet long and about 10 feet in height with a general thickness of about 10 feet."

V(6).90

GSL

The inscription is not in a good state of preservation, as the surface of the rock is rough and exposed to weather. The only way, in my opinion, of preserving the record is by an impression of the whole inscribed surface.

The village headmen should be made responsible that no wilful damage is done to the inscription.

Ranigat near Nogram.

The ruined fortress on the hill of Ranigat is beyond the British frontier in the Khudo Kheyl country. Both Löwenthal, General Cunningham and Dr. Bellew have described it; but no systematic survey or examination has been made to reveal the condition of the various buildings. General Cunningham gives a rough plan at page 103, and a sketch of the fort at page 107 of Volume II, Archæological Survey.

The patches of shrubs and trees which conceal the walls should be removed, and the outline of the buildings carefully laid bare, so as to permit of an accurate plan being made before any extensive removal of earth.

A few surface excavations have been made, and small fragments of broken statues, &c., cover the surface of the ground. Some of these are represented in the accompanying illustration, and give an idea of the general character of the carvings, and their resemblance to Greek sculpture.

The village of Nogram was deserted at the time of my visit, on account of fights between the sections of the Khudo Kheyls; but I understand that the civil authorities could make arrangements with the tribe for the supply of labour for excavations. It would, I think, be necessary to pay the men a small daily wage, and also to give rewards for remains excavated and delivered perfect and unmutilated. Care would be necessary to prevent damage in laying bare the walls of the buildings. On completion of the work and removal of the valuable stones, an agreement should be made with the tribe to prevent wilful damage to the fortress ruins.

Karamar Hill.

The ruined monasteries, which seem very numerous along this mountain range, are so inaccessible on the steep scarps of the hill that there seems little danger of damage being done wilfully by the natives.

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EUSOFZAI SCULPTURES.

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I saw the buildings and topes at a distance only, during the ride from Shewa to Bakshali.

Bakshali.

This village is built on ruins, and some interesting discoveries were made lately. An old Sanscrit papyrus book being unearthed in a field was sent to General Cunningham for examination. Mr. Robinson also obtained an ancient pencil and stone lamp. This site would probably yield a good deal of interesting matter, but search can only be made voluntarily by the natives for rewards, as the greater part of the ruins are under the village houses.

Takht-i-Bahi.

This prominent hill, which rises some 500 feet above the Eusofzai plain, is about eight miles from Mardan, and its ruins have been described by General Cunningham in Volume V of the Archæological Survey, and by Dr. Bellew in his Report on Eusofzai.

The ruins are very extensive and most interesting; the disposition of the monasteries and dwellings can be clearly traced from the upper points of the Takht-i-Bahi range; but on near approach it becomes evident that great damage has been done by excavators and earthquakes. The digging has had but one object, namely, the ready removal of sculptures and statues which adorned the cloisters and topes; added to this earthquakes have overturned and rent the massive and lofty walls.

The only thing to be done at present is, in my opinion, to prohibit irregular and unauthorised excavations, and to have the place watched by the headmen of the neighbouring village.

Charsuddah.

Close to the junction of the Swat with the Kabul river, and between the branches of the former stream, is a large fort called locally the Bala Hissar. General Cunningham identifies the locality as the position of Puskalavati mentioned in the 7th century A.D. by Hwen Thsang, and directed excavations in the fort and in mounds around the town of Charsuddah. The fort, which was evidently adapted by the Pathans, is too much ruined to be of any value for purposes of conservation. Lieutenant Martin, who was here at work with a field company of sappers, revealed the principal entrances into the stronghold and some curious irrigation channels

GSL

of excellent pottery leading from an ancient well. He also found in neighbouring mounds some fragments of Græco-Buddhist sculptures similar to those already transported from the Peshawar district to the Lahore Museum—only smaller and more imperfect. They appeared to me valuable only from an archæological point of view. The most remarkable sculpture shown to me by Lieutenant Martin was a small stone centaur or human-headed horse.

5. The conclusions I arrived at during this visit are as follows :—

There are objections to the employment of Pathan sappers in making excavations—

(*a*) Their religion encourages them to deface figure carvings.

(*b*) Their work depends on the interest which the officer commanding takes in archæology.

(*c*) The presence of small bodies of soldiers at remote parts of the frontier is apt to tempt the tribes (who are generally at feud with each other) to embroil their enemies in difficulties with the British, easily brought about by a single shot.

6. I am therefore of the opinion that the more efficient manner of securing the preservation of the interesting remains which abound in the Kabul valley is to enlist the people themselves in the work, making it their interest to produce perfect and unmutilated sculptures or other antiquities.

There are, I submit, two ways of doing this—

1st, by placing a sum of money at the disposal of the civil authorities, to be applied in small rewards for perfect specimens of inscriptions, carvings, statuary, coins, or relics of any kind. An annual grant of about Rs. 1,000 would, I think, produce considerable results.

2nd, by systematically removing sculptures, &c., from particular localities, rich in remains, by means of an organised gang of the tribespeople.

It would be necessary to provide for superintendence, and to send a responsible person to survey, lay out the tasks, and pay for labour.

74 CSL

7. It is generally agreed that Ranigat would be likely to yield valuable discoveries, and a native with local knowledge would probably be the best supervisor. He should know how to measure and make plans of buildings, and learn how to take impressions of inscriptions in gutta-percha paper, &c. It would be best for him to be directly under the civil authorities in the district, but I would direct the technicalities of his operations, and inspect his work as occasion required.

A small grant of Rs. 2,000 would probably cover such expenses.

8. As regards the interesting localities in the district, I recommend that the headmen of villages, or influential natives, be made responsible for preventing damage, and the ruins at Jamal Garhi, Takht-i-bahi, Sahri Bahlol, Sawaldher and Kharkhai are particularly worthy of custody.

H. H. COLE, CAPTAIN, R.E.,
Curator of Ancient Monuments in India.

19th June 1882.

Govt. Central Branch Press, Simla.—No. 10 H. D., C. B.—26-6-82.—200.